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Mrs Susan Conron
Headteacher
Highfield Nursery School
Wright Street
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Dear Mrs Conron

Short inspection of Highfield Nursery School

Following my visit to the school on 28 February 2018, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be outstanding in July 2014.

The school continues to be outstanding.

You and the new leadership team have maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection. Staff and parents and carers praise the excellent leadership you have provided since your appointment last April. You have communicated to them your passionate commitment to helping children achieve their best. All are proud to be part of this outstanding school.

Parents are very satisfied with this very happy and welcoming school. They particularly like the way you and the staff help them as well as their children. They very much appreciate the staff's willingness to talk with them about their children and to show them how to help their children learn. They are full of praise for how quickly staff help their children to become confident little learners, able to speak, listen and communicate with others, including if they have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. The online system of communication ensures that parents receive up-to-the-minute information on their children's learning and progress.

Children are happy and settled. They readily leave their parents, anxious to get to the many exciting tasks staff prepare for them. Their behaviour is exemplary. They follow instructions well and quickly become absorbed in their learning. Relationships are excellent throughout the school.

At the time of the previous inspection, leaders were asked to provide more opportunities to develop children's ability to engage in imaginative play. You have done this very successfully. Children thrive at Highfield because you and the staff ensure that activities arise out of their interests, stimulate their curiosity and

encourage them to take their learning in different directions. You and I watched this happening when, for example, some children became fascinated by the smells and textures of herbs and vegetables, and other children built ships to take them on a voyage across the sea.

Safeguarding is effective.

A culture of vigilance exists throughout the school because you have ensured that safeguarding, including children's health, safety and well-being, is seen as a high priority for everyone. Leaders and governors have ensured that secure safeguarding arrangements are in place and records are detailed and of a suitable quality. You monitor the agreed systems and procedures meticulously to ensure that they remain so. You make sure that parents understand the school's responsibilities and the actions that might be taken to keep children safe and well looked after at all times.

All training, including for first aid and child protection, is up to date. All staff, governors and volunteers are vetted to make sure that they are suitable to work with children. Suitable risk assessments are carried out for all relevant activities and spaces, indoors and out. You ensure that children receive and understand guidance on how to keep themselves safe. You carefully check that staff adhere to the arrangements for ensuring children's privacy, for example when sleeping, having their nappy changed or going to the toilet.

Inspection findings

- Following your appointment as headteacher at Highfield, the school began a collaboration with Duke Street Nursery school, where you are also headteacher. You have seized the opportunities arising from the collaboration to improve the quality of education further at Highfield.
- One of the key lines of enquiry for this inspection was to find out whether the progress children make remains outstanding, and whether it is the same for all children. You care deeply that each child succeeds and have inspired staff with your enthusiasm. Staff have equally high expectations for every child, and all children make excellent progress.
- Staff think carefully about their work and the way it affects each child's learning. They readily adjust activities, including during lessons, to make sure that children learn well. All assessment information is used exceedingly well to help each child make progress. The recent work on breaking down learning statements further for children who have SEN and/or disabilities is enabling you to track even the smallest steps in progress.
- Staff very much appreciate being able to work across Highfield and Duke Street schools to learn from each other. They are skilled at asking children questions, at helping them to think and learn in different ways and at giving them time to show what they are learning. Equally, they let children explore learning for themselves.

- Adults show children that they value what they are doing. For example, when two children approached an adult working with a specific group, the adult took time to encourage the development of musical vocabulary as the children excitedly showed that they had worked out for themselves how to play a drum in different ways.
- The excellent focus on developing spoken language is successfully developing the children's vocabulary and their ability to communicate orally with others. For example, staff seldom accept one-word answers. Instead, they encourage children to answer fully and, where possible, in sentences.
- Staff rarely miss an opportunity to help the children learn better. Nevertheless, there are some minor differences between the morning and afternoon sessions, for example in the interactions between staff and children, and in the use of the excellent resources available. These very occasionally lead to children wandering for a short while instead of being fully engaged in learning.
- Another line of enquiry was about children's behaviour and their attendance. As stated earlier in this letter, behaviour is exemplary. Children understand that actions have consequences and that rights come with responsibilities. They help to draw up simple rules to keep the Nursery a safe place for everyone. You have done a tremendous amount of work on improving attendance and have been successful in doing so. You have impressed on parents the value of regular attendance in helping to build children's confidence and self-esteem, and their ability to get on with others, as well as getting them ready for school with early reading, writing and number skills. The vast majority of parents are beginning to cooperate well.
- In addition, I looked at the quality of leadership and management, and its impact on children's learning. You very quickly got staff on board when you took over and focused everyone on achieving what is best for each child. The checks you and other senior leaders make on teaching and learning are thorough and they lead to improvement.
- The changes you have made, and the excellent range of resources now in place, encourage children to explore and have fun as they learn, and to have quiet times, indoors and out. For example, the children thoroughly enjoyed exploring the snow, making patterns and discussing why the water tray was frozen and artefacts were encased in ice. They were wrapped up well and their delight shone on their faces.
- To tackle the poor language skills that many children have when they come to the Nursery, you have ensured that there is plenty to promote literacy as well as to develop early mathematical skills. You have ensured that staff weave these key skills into all learning. Governors keep a close check on the school's work. They know just what questions to ask to make sure that they are up to date with everything. They hold the school to account well.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that:

- there is consistency in the quality of interactions between staff and children so that children's learning, particularly their language development, is catered for equally well in both the morning and afternoon sessions.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Lancashire. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Doris Bell
Ofsted Inspector

Information about the inspection

I carried out a variety of activities during the inspection. I met with you throughout the day. We observed together across the Nursery in the morning and I visited the afternoon session. With your assistant headteacher, we looked at assessment information and analysed the work in children's learning journeys. I scrutinised a range of documents, including the school's own evaluation of performance and all safeguarding records, including those relating to attendance. I explored your recruitment and vetting procedures and talked with parents and staff about safeguarding. I met with governors and with a representative of the local authority. I spoke with parents as they brought their children to school and I took account of the 16 responses to Parent View. I took account of the 15 responses to Ofsted's questionnaire for staff.